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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED

ON SABBATH MORNING, JAN. 4, 1846,

CONTAINING

SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY

OF THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

AND CONGREGATION, ALBANY,

DURING THIRTY YEARS FROM THE PERIOD
OF THEIR ORGANIZATION.

BY THEIR PASTOR,
WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SESSION
AND TRUSTEES.

ALBANY:
ERASTUS H. PEASE.
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Gift of the Author

William B. Sprague, D.D.

of Albany.



J. MUNESLL, PRINTER.

HISTORICAL SERMON.

I. SAMUEL, VII., 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBENEZER, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

The occasion of this incident, as you will doubtless remember, was the signal victory which the people of Israel, under the direction of Samuel, gained over the Philistines. Samuel, who was the last of the judges, stood forth, at a time of great declension, an eminent reformer. Having charged the people to put away all their idols, and return to the worship and service of the true God, he commanded them to assemble at a place called Mizpeh, supposed to have been about eighteen miles northwest of Jerusalem, with a view to make public confession of their sins, and, with appropriate expressions of humiliation,

to seek the divine forgiveness. This gathering, though it was strictly for a religious purpose, awakened the apprehensions of the Philistines, that it might be a rendezvous for war; and forthwith they put themselves into a hostile attitude, and marched forth against Israel in all the pomp and terror of an invading army. The Israelites, alarmed at their approach, earnestly implored Samuel to intercede with the Lord their God, that he would save them out of the hand of their enemies. And while Samuel, agreeably to their request, was engaged in this pious act, at the same time offering up a lamb for a burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle; and scarcely had the prayer passed from his lips, when “the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines,” to their complete discomfiture; the consequence of which was that they fell an easy prey into the hands of the Israelites. Samuel deeply felt that the victory was from God; and our text records the manner in which he acknowledged it. “Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBEN-EZER, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

This devout recognition by Samuel of God's paternal care and goodness toward the Israelites, is but a faithful expression of the feelings of every good man in the review of his own personal experience. In the recollection of the duties he has been enabled to discharge, of the trials he has been enabled to endure, of the temptations he has been enabled to overcome, of the perils he has been enabled to survive, he is deeply conscious of having been under the guidance and guardianship of an all-wise, almighty and all-gracious God. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me: to him be rendered the gratitude of my heart, the praise of my lips, the obedience of my life."

This language is as appropriate to communities as to individuals; for, while a community is nothing else than a collection of individuals, these individuals are the subjects of many common mercies, for which a common tribute of thanksgiving should be rendered. Indeed it was in reference to a community—to the people of Israel at large, that this expression was originally uttered by Samuel: when he looked around and saw their enemies fallen and scattered, as in a moment, it led

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him to consider that, not on that occasion only, but through their whole previous course, the hand of the Lord had been upon them for good; and hence the retrospective bearing of the declaration, "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*" It will surely be no forced application of the passage, to use it as introductory to the brief history of our own church, which I design this morning to bring before you; for, while the most general view of our experience as a Christian society cannot fail to supply materials for fervent gratitude to God, we shall, if I mistake not, find that these materials thicken upon us, the more closely and minutely our history is contemplated.

It may possibly occur to some, that this church is still too much in its infancy to furnish a legitimate subject for historical detail; and, therefore, that the whole matter should be left at least to the next generation. But in reply to this I would say, that much the larger portion of those who now constitute the congregation, have joined it long since the establishment of the church; and they, of course, will be glad to be informed in respect to its early history. And as for the original mem-

bers who still remain, it surely cannot fail to interest *them* to have their thoughts directed back to the good providence of God, as they have seen it manifested toward the church from the beginning to the present hour. The time allotted to this service will not allow of any thing beyond a mere outline of our history; but *that* I trust will be found a faithful one, the materials having been supplied either by written records, or by the recollection of many of our older members.

As the original settlers of this city, whose descendants, for a long time, held a nearly exclusive possession of it, were from Holland, it happened, as might have been expected, that the only religious denomination that existed here for much more than a century, was the Reformed Dutch. By the close of the French war in 1763, however, there was a sufficient number of Presbyterians here to justify the project of establishing a Presbyterian church; and such a church was actually established in the latter part of that year, and the Rev. William Hanna was chosen its first pastor. Their first place of worship was on a lot bounded on the east by William street, on

the north by Beaver street, on the south by Hudson street, and on the west by Grand street. It was a building of considerable size, with a tall steeple, and fronting to the east; and it continued to be occupied by the church till 1796, when their present place of worship in Beaver street was erected. Their first minister, Mr. Hanna, continued with them but about two years, and was succeeded by the Rev. Andrew Bay, who remained five years; and from that period till after the close of the revolution, the church seems to have been without a pastor. In 1785 the Rev. John McDonald took the pastoral charge of the church, and after him, successively, the Rev. Eliphalet Nott, the Rev. John B. Romeyn, and the Rev. William Neill, the latter of whom held the place when the colony came out of which our own church was originally formed.*

The immediate occasion of the establishment of this church, was the increase of the number of Presbyterians in the city, beyond the capacity of the only building that existed for their accommodation. For a considerable

* For the above facts I am indebted to the Rev. Dr. J. N. Campbell, the present pastor of the first church.

time, the place in which they worshipped had been found too strait for them, and in the month of July, 1813, several enterprising individuals agreed to circulate proposals for erecting a new church edifice. They found many ready to coöperate with them in the enterprise, and in a few days a sufficient sum was subscribed for the purpose contemplated.

Having chosen a board of trustees,* they proceeded, at once, with great vigour, to the erection of the building; and, without any

* This board consisted originally of John L. Winne, Joseph Russell, Nathaniel Davis and Roderick Sedgwick, with James Kane as president. Since that period, the office of trustee has been held by the following individuals: Chandler Starr, John Townsend, Elisha Jenkins, Philip Parker, Elias Mather, Joseph Alexander, John I. Boyd, James B. Douglass, Thomas Herring, Israel Smith, John T. Norton, John F. Bacon, Erastus Corning, Charles B. Webb, Seth Hastings, E. P. Prentice, Thomas W. Olcott, Archibald McIntyre, Alexander Marvin, and Joel Rathbone. The present board consists of Messrs. Alexander, McIntyre, Townsend, Corning, Olcott, Boyd, Marvin, Prentice, and Rathbone. Elisha Jenkins succeeded James Kane as president of the board in July, 1817, and Joseph Alexander succeeded Elisha Jenkins, May, 1820, and has held the office to the present time. Joseph Russell was treasurer of the congregation from July, 1813 to January, 1816, when Nathaniel Davis succeeded him in the office, and has continued in it ever since.

material interruption in the work, they brought this spacious edifice to its completion about the close of the summer of 1815. It was dedicated in the month of September, the services on the occasion being performed by the Rev. Dr. Neill. A few days after, the Rev. John Chester, then of Hudson, received a unanimous call from the congregation to become their pastor; and he, having signified his acceptance of the call, was installed by the Presbytery of Albany, on the 3d of November following.

On the 3d of December, the congregation proceeded to an election of elders, which resulted in the choice of John L. Winne, John Boardman, Chester Bulkley and Uriah Marvin; who were severally ordained to the office on the 10th of the same month. The session held its first meeting on the 8th of December, at the residence of the pastor, No. 8 Water street.

On the first sabbath in February, 1816, the church was regularly constituted, consisting of forty-five members, who had either been examined and approved by the session, or

else had brought their certificates from the several churches with which they had been previously connected.* On the same day, and in connection with the same solemnity, the sacrament of the Lord's supper was celebrated in this house for the first time.

* It was certainly a somewhat anomalous procedure in the history of Presbyterian church government, that a minister should have been installed, and that elders chosen by the congregation should have been examining persons for admission to the church, several months before a church was constituted. In reply to a letter of inquiry on the subject addressed to one of the senior members of the Presbytery, who, it is believed, was present and participated in the installation, the author has received the following explanatory note:

"As far as I can recollect, the persons associating to build said church, made it a condition of the association that Mr. Chester should be called; and having become incorporated under the style of the Second Presbyterian Church, proceeded to make out a call in the usual form; and Mr. Chester having accepted the same, was installed; after which, elders were chosen, being, in part or whole, from the eldership of the first church. After this, the said elders examined such persons as offered to unite in forming a second church, which persons were not formally united in church covenant till the time stated in your letter. I presume the members of the Presbytery were ignorant of the facts of the case till they met; and though the proceedings had been irregular, deemed it advisable to constitute the relation between the congregation and the pastor of their choice."

From this period till the year 1828, embracing the whole active ministry of Dr. Chester, the church enjoyed no inconsiderable degree of both temporal and spiritual prosperity; and yet its course was so uniform that there was scarcely anything of incident worthy to be recorded. At one time, indeed, it was embarrassed by a considerable debt; but the pastor, perceiving this, came forward, with his accustomed magnanimity, and relinquished his entire salary, casting himself for support on the benevolence of the congregation, until the debt should be extinguished. It is hardly necessary to say that the object in reference to which he had so generously taken the lead, was very quickly accomplished; and that the congregation did not allow their pastor ultimately to be a loser for his liberality.

Towards the close of 1827, Dr. Chester began to develope symptoms of disease, which awakened serious apprehensions in his friends, that his usefulness, and even his life, might be drawing to a close. For some time, he resisted their earnest requests that he should temporarily suspend his labours, and give himself to relaxation, if not use more positive

measures for his relief; but in the spring of 1828, he found his health so much impaired, that he reluctantly yielded to the wishes of his friends, and journeyed south as far as the White Sulphur Springs, in Virginia. During a residence there of a few weeks, he was not a little encouraged to hope that the waters might be instrumental of his complete restoration; and this hope he expressed in a touching letter addressed to the trustees, coupled, however, with a sentiment of entire resignation to the will of an overruling Providence.

But the hope which this letter expressed, as well as that which the letter itself awakened among his anxious charge, was destined to be only the harbinger of disappointment. He came back indeed; but it was only to stand once more in this sacred place, and to bid his friends here a final farewell. His last meeting with the congregation, which is still fresh in the recollections of many of you, was, I doubt not, the most affecting scene in the history of this church. Before the close of the morning service, he requested the congregation to join him in the singing of that imitable hymn, "*Jesus, lover of my soul;*" and

his rich and melodious voice mingling with the voices of many of his beloved charge, in the utterance of sentiments which, in the uncertainty of his earthly prospects, had become more dear to him than ever, produced an effect from which the most insensible could not escape. After the singing, he addressed the congregation, for a few moments, with deep emotion, and, on his pronouncing the benediction, requested the male members to remain after the rest had retired. He then read to them a brief but most touching communication, which, fortunately, is still preserved, in which he expressed his apprehensions that the interests of the congregation might suffer by reason of his protracted separation from them, consequent upon his illness, and begged permission to resign his pastoral charge. He had no sooner retired to give them opportunity to act on the subject of his resignation, than the following resolution was offered and unanimously carried, viz.—that “we can not consent to any separation between ourselves and our pastor, till it shall please Almighty God to remove him by death;” followed by another, viz: “that he shall have leave of

absence for one year, his salary being continued to him as heretofore." I need not say that this arrangement was honourable alike to pastor and to people.

This was the last occasion on which Dr. Chester was in this house. He remained in the city a few days, and then passed a little time among his friends in New England, where I well remember to have met him, and to have been forcibly struck with the contrast between the manifest prostration of his physical powers and the undiminished buoyancy of his animal spirits. He was then making his arrangements for a speedy departure to the south of France; but the very next intelligence I received concerning him, was in the form of an obituary record in a newspaper. Having gone to visit his friends in Philadelphia, his disease, while he was there, suddenly assumed a more aggravated form; and, on the 12th of January, 1829, surrounded with his immediate relatives, though separated from his beloved flock, he breathed forth his spirit with perfect tranquillity into the bosom of his Redeemer.

When the news of his death reached this

city, the trustees of the church immediately sent a request to his family friends, that, if it should be consistent with their feelings, they would allow his remains to be brought hither, that they might find their final resting place in the midst of his devoted people. But his venerable father in law, the late excellent Robert Ralston, in whose house he had died, immediately returned an answer to their request, evincing the most tender and delicate respect for their wishes, but intimating that it would be more grateful to his bereaved relatives that the body should not be removed from Philadelphia. Of course the trustees readily yielded to the prior claim of his own family, though they did not fail to testify their regard for his memory, by erecting, shortly after, a suitable monument in our own burial place.

On the morning of the sabbath immediately succeeding his death, an affecting and eloquent discourse was delivered with reference to the event, by the Rev. Asa T. Hopkins, now of Buffalo, who was then engaged as a temporary supply; and on the sabbath morning next succeeding, Dr. Nott administered the sacrament of the Lord's supper, and

at the close of his discourse, pronounced a eulogy on Dr. Chester, and incidentally on that immortal statesman De Witt Clinton, also, who had been accustomed to worship in this house, but had died a few months before—in a strain of the most pathetic and lofty eloquence. In the evening of the same day, the Rev. Dr. Tucker, then of Troy, delivered a funeral sermon, in which he presented a just and faithful sketch of his lamented friend, the materials for which had been supplied to him by a long and familiar acquaintance. Each of these several tributes to the memory of your beloved pastor, is in print, with the exception of that by Mr. Hopkins.

Of what Dr. Chester* was in his private

* Dr. Chester was the son of Col. John Chester, an officer of the revolution, and was born in Weathersfield, Conn., in the year 1785. He was fitted for college chiefly by the Rev. Dr. Azel Backus of Bethlehem, afterwards President of Hamilton College; was admitted a member of Yale College in 1800, and graduated in 1804; pursued his theological studies under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Lyman of Hatfield, Mass.; was licensed to preach by the association of Hartford county, Conn., in 1807; and after preaching successively for a short time at Marblehead and Springfield in Mass., and receiving a call from the Presbyterian church in Cooperstown to become their pastor, he was ordained and installed pastor of the Presbyterian church in Hudson, where he continued till his removal to Albany.

and public relations, there is little necessity that I should speak; for, to say nothing of the fact that there are in existence, as you have just heard, several brief but faithful sketches of his character, the memory of his gifts and his graces, cannot, in this community at least, soon, if ever die. It would not be fitting, however, that such an occasion as this should pass, without at least some slight tribute to his memory; and though years have fled since you were permitted to sit under his ministry, and to witness the beamings of his kindly and generous spirit, I am sure that you will require of me no apology for endeavouring, for a moment, to bring up before you his endeared and venerated image.

In his original constitution, Dr. Chester was, in many respects, a remarkably fine model of a man. With uncommonly quick perceptions, with an elegant taste, glowing imagination, and an easy and graceful utterance, he united a warm and generous sensibility, which vibrated instinctively to any note whatever in the scale of human w^o. He had also the advantage of a fine personal appearance: his manners, for refinement and

gracefulness, were worthy of the court, while yet, for simplicity and gentleness and affection, they were worthy of the school of Christ. As a preacher, he was highly evangelical, persuasive and fervent; he always aimed at the illustration of some important truth, and his fine fancy and winning manner never failed to throw around his subject powerful attractions. In the pastoral relation, especially in his intercourse with the sick and the afflicted, I have been often assured that he possessed an advantage that was well nigh peculiar to himself: his tender sympathies enabled him to feel the sorrows of others, almost as if they had been his own; and his full heart was ever ready to pour itself out in the most tender and consolatory expressions. He was pre-eminently the friend of the poor, and was often seen going personally into the hovels of want and distress, to administer to the necessities of the body as well as the spirit. He was ever ready to lend a helping hand to all the great interests of society; and when he died, it was not his own congregation alone that mourned his loss, but the city and the community at large felt that a great public

benefactor had been taken away. His record is to be found not merely in the history of many a soul turned from darkness to light, but in the grateful remembrances of many a child of want and wo, in the useful career of many a young man whom his efforts helped to educate, in the increased spirit of mutual good will among different communions of Christians, in the extinction of the hot coals of strife which a single breath might have fanned into a flame, in the successful operation of various institutions designed to bless the world, and in the general advancement of the great cause of truth and piety.

From the time that Dr. Chester's enfeebled health rendered it necessary, even in his own view, that he should intermit his public labours, the pulpit was supplied for some two months by the Rev. Sylvester Eaton, who had been early much indebted to Dr. Chester's friendship, and who never, while he lived, ceased to speak of him in terms of the most grateful and affectionate respect. To him succeeded the Rev. Edward N. Kirk, now of Boston, who, after occupying the pulpit for several sabbaths, retired with between forty and

fifty members of the church, and formed the fourth Presbyterian church in this city. Of the circumstances in which this secession took place, I shall not be expected to speak, particularly as I was not here to be a witness of it; but there is one thing of which I *may* speak—of which I account it a privilege to speak—I refer to the restoration of mutual good will between the two churches, and to the harmony and efficiency which our sister church exhibits under the ministrations of its present excellent pastor.* May the blessing of Zion's King ever rest upon them, and may they and we, thrown together as we are by the providence of God, be found, as God may give opportunity, helpers of each other's joy, and striving together for the faith of the gospel.

After Mr. Kirk closed his labours in the church, the pulpit was supplied for some time by the Rev. Mr. Hopkins, of whom I have already spoken in connection with the death of Dr. Chester. So acceptable to the congregation were his services, that they began soon to entertain the idea of giving him a call;

* Rev. Samuel W. Fisher.

and accordingly, on the 2d of March, 1829, a call was made out for him, accompanied with the accommodating provision that, in consideration of his limited experience in the ministry, he should be required, during the first year, to preach but one sermon on each sabbath. On mature reflection, however, he thought it expedient to decline the call, and was soon after settled in another field of labour. From the time that he withdrew from the pulpit, the congregation, I believe, depended chiefly upon casual supplies, till the period of my introduction among you.

My first sermon in this pulpit was preached by your pastor's request, as I was casually passing through the city, when I had yet scarcely emerged from my clerical boyhood. From that time, I never met the congregation till the last sabbath in June, 1829, immediately after I received an invitation to become your pastor. As I had not been heard as a candidate previous to the making out of the call, I came immediately hither, and occupied the pulpit one sabbath; and it was not till I had ascertained the wishes of the congregation,

after I had preached to them, that I considered the question of acceptance fairly before me. The assurance which I then received of their undiminished unanimity, in connection with other propitious circumstances, led me to give to the call an affirmative answer; notwithstanding it was a step that separated me from the only church with which I had ever been officially connected, and which, after these many years of separation, I still retain . in most affectionate remembrance. The preliminaries having been arranged, my installation took place in this house, on the evening of the 26th of August—just ten years and one day from the time of my ordination at West Springfield. The sermon on the occasion was preached by my ever venerated and beloved friend and instructor, the Rev. Dr. Miller, of Princeton, and was published.

In 1830 the adjoining lecture room was built, which has since furnished ample accommodation, not only for the Wednesday evening lecture, but for the sabbath school, and for most of the occasional services connected with the church. Previous to the erection of that edifice, the weekly lecture was held in

this house, the Saturday evening prayer meeting at a private dwelling, and the exercises of the sabbath school in some public room secured for the purpose.

The whole number admitted to the communion of the church since its formation, as appears from the record, is 1147. Of these 713 have joined on a profession of their faith, and 434 have been admitted on certificate from other churches. The greatest number that have been admitted during any one year, was 117, in connexion chiefly with the extensive revival in 1843—the smallest number, I am pained to say, has been during the present year, which, though not completed till after our next communion, has thus far added only 8. It is known that 129 have died while they have been in communion with this church, and 288 have been dismissed by their own request, with a view to their becoming members of other churches. Our record exhibits at this time 730 in full communion. The whole number who have been baptized in this church is 988—773 infants and 215 adults.

This church has witnessed several seasons

of revival in consequence of which both her numbers and her strength have been greatly increased. The most memorable was the one in 1843, to which I have already adverted; but beside this, there have been two others of no inconsiderable power during my own ministry; one in 1831, and one in 1840; and there was yet another that occurred at an earlier period, under the ministry of my excellent predecessor, and in connection partly with the labours of the lamented Nettleton. It is gratifying to me to be able to say that the means employed in these several revivals have been of the most rational and sober kind—nothing more than an increase of the ordinary means of grace, in connection with one or more meetings in the week for private religious counsel and inquiry. I think it proper to state that our religious services, during the last revival particularly, were multiplied much beyond what I should have thought expedient under different circumstances; believing as I do, that there is nothing more important to an awakened sinner or to a young convert, than that much of his time should be devoted to private reflection and

self-communion ; but the peremptory demand for public meetings, which, if it could not be satisfied in one place, *would* be satisfied in another, left us with no doubt of the expediency of the course which we actually adopted. I may add that this procedure, so far as we could judge, was fully justified by the favourable result.

The sabbath school connected with this church was originally commenced in July, 1817, by the late James McClure, in connection with several other benevolent individuals; and in November following, it was commended by the pastor to the patronage of the church, as furnishing an important means for the education of the children of the poor. This original feature of the institution, it is well known, has since been modified by the introduction into the school of children of all classes; and though there is no reason to fear that too many of any class will come within the reach of its privileges, it may reasonably be questioned whether the particular class for which it was originally designed, have not come to be, in too great a degree, overlooked. I hardly need say that our own sabbath school

has generally been in a prosperous state, and has proved an efficient auxiliary to the spiritual interests of the congregation. A large portion of all the active piety which this church has ever embraced, has been employed in the work of sabbath school instruction; and even men who have occupied high places in society, have regarded it a privilege to have their names enrolled on the list of our teachers. The Bible classes which, for some time past, have been connected with the school, under the conduct of intelligent members of the church, have already been, and promise still to be, a source of the most important benefit. If the entire history of the school could be written, I doubt not that it would exhibit a record of self-denying labours and earnest prayers on the one hand, and of good impressions matured into habits of piety and usefulness on the other, that would quicken our sense of the importance of the institution, and lead us to resolve that, by God's blessing, it shall not be permitted to languish for the want of our best efforts to sustain it.

The monthly concert of prayer in this church is nearly coeval with the church itself.

It was resolved by the session, at a meeting held Dec. 29, 1815, that they would recommend to this church to join with their sister churches in the city, of the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed denominations, in observing, in common with a considerable portion of Christendom, the first Monday evening of each month, as a season of prayer with special reference to the conversion of the world. This arrangement was accordingly entered into, and the first meeting was in this house, on the first Monday evening of January, 1816. This service continued to be held, monthly, in rotation, in the several churches before mentioned, for nearly twenty years, and was always conducted by one or more of the pastors who were present. But, as the number of attendants on these occasions was generally small, and was made up, with few exceptions, of the members of the particular church in which the meeting was held, it was thought expedient, about 1834, to institute separate meetings in the several churches, in the hope of securing a greater aggregate attendance. This arrangement has continued to the present time; though, in most or all of the

churches, including our own, the time for the service has been changed from Monday to Sunday evening. This also was designed to increase the attendance; and, to some extent, it has had the effect; though I feel constrained to say that, considering the magnitude of the object which the service contemplates, it is matter of just surprise that there are still so few even of the members of the church usually present to engage in it.

Of the amount which has been contributed by this congregation to the various objects of Christian benevolence, no record, so far as I know, exists, and I have no data upon which to base even a conjecture concerning it. I may say, however, without the fear of contradiction, that this church has, from the beginning, been distinguished by its liberality and public spirit; and though it has not failed to discriminate in respect to the objects of its charity, it has given freely to sustain all the great interests of our common Christianity. I speak this, brethren, to your praise; though I would have you bear in mind that it is not the mere external act of giving, but the motive that prompts to it, that will be of account

in the eye of your final Judge. I would have you remember too, that God has blessed you, as a congregation, with no common measure of temporal prosperity, and that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him will be much required.”

I have already mentioned the names of those who composed the original eldership of the church. Since that time there have been several elections at different periods, and the following individuals either have held or now hold the office—viz: Nathaniel Davis, Archibald Campbell, Lemuel Jenkins, James Brown, Daniel P. Clark, Galen Bachelder, Archibald McClure and John Winne. Of the whole number who have been chosen from the beginning, four have tendered their resignations, three have become connected with other churches, and one only,* a comparatively young man, of uncommon excellence and usefulness, has been called to his reward. The office of deacon has been held successively by Daniel P. Clark, and John Kelso.

* James Brown, who, having been attacked by pulmonary disease, went to visit his friends in Norwich, Vt., and died there, August 28, 1839.

It is due to myself and to my brethren of the session, to state, that, in all my intercourse with them, whether private or official, I have experienced the most uniform kindness at their hands, and have always found them ready to coöperate with me in every thing that involved the interests of our particular church, or the more general interests of the church at large. In their sympathies and counsels and active efforts, I have found much to lighten the burden of my labours; and my heart's desire and prayer to God is, that they may have yet many years more of useful activity in the church on earth, and may at last be found among those who have turned many to righteousness.

It is an occasion for the most grateful acknowledgement before God to day, that the harmony which pervaded this church in its origin, has continued, with scarcely an interruption, to the present hour. I say *scarcely* an interruption; for it was no doubt a somewhat violent conflict of opinion and feeling that produced the secession in 1829; but the agitation, so far as respected the internal state of the church, quickly subsided, and the mem-

bers who remained were drawn perhaps more closely together than they had ever been before. With this single exception, I am not aware that our history records anything approaching to a serious controversy. I do not mean that, on every subject, there has been a perfect agreement of opinion—*that*, in so large a community, were not to be expected; but I mean that, on all subjects of importance, connected with the promotion of the interests of religion, you have generally been of one mind; and even where individuals have differed from the mass, they have readily consented to yield their private predilections to the opinion of the majority. This peaceable spirit which has so long prevailed, and which is so generally diffused among us, is a blessing which we cannot too highly prize, and with which I trust no one will venture to trifle. If you would know the full value of the blessing, look at those churches—and would to God there were not so many of them—in which the spirit of contention has prevailed, till you can scarcely recognize a vestige of the religion of the Prince of Peace; and then return and say how much it is worth

to belong to a community of Christians, who, in some good degree, have learned to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

There is yet another feature in the history of our church, to which I cannot forbear to advert, as indicating the special favour of Providence towards us—I refer to the fact that, as a congregation, we have had no sympathy with any of the ultraisms of the day, either on the right hand or on the left. During more than half of the time since this church has existed, you are aware that a spirit of reckless fanaticism has been abroad among the churches; here discovering itself in one form, and there in another; but every where generating confusion and strife, and often carrying desolation in its progress. To the influence of this spirit, many good men and good ministers have temporarily yielded, and have done things which the Master could not approve, which they themselves subsequently could not approve, with the honest conviction that they were labouring to good purpose in the best of causes. A large portion of them have already come back to the old paths of Christian sobriety and discretion; and, instead of taunt-

ing them with their mistakes—for who is not liable to err?—we would welcome their return, and do what we can to establish them in the right. And while this spirit of indiscreet and unhallowed zeal has existed so extensively, it has been the occasion of driving not a few to the opposite extreme; to the extreme of looking suspiciously upon all revivals of religion, and all works of reform, and, in some instances, of rendering the terms of Christian fellowship so strict as to interfere with its legitimate exercise. I rejoice that this extreme as well as the other has, to a great extent, disappeared; but *that* for which I would especially be grateful, is, that this church has never, for an hour, yielded to either of them. While she has deprecated the extravagance and disorder by which the cause of revivals has suffered so much, she has always regarded the cause itself as of God; and has shown herself ready to labour for its promotion. While she has not been insensible to prevailing doctrinal errors, neither has she been disposed to make a man an offender for a word, nor to thrust from the arms of her charity those whom she has had reason to believe

the Saviour did not disown. In short, if I mistake not, her motto has always been, "Truth and love;" and may that continue to be her motto, till she shall be merged in that great community of the faithful, in which truth and love shall exist in absolute perfection.

If I may venture to suggest a reason for your having thus, as a congregation, held on the even tenor of your way, I will say that I attribute it, under God, in no small degree, to the sober, enlightened and liberal views of those to whom the destinies of this church were committed in its infancy, and especially of its well judging and excellent pastor. Happily, it received a healthful direction, while it was yet in the state of being formed; and this has rendered it, in latter years, a comparatively easy matter to preserve it from erratic and disorderly courses. I thank God for his gracious interpositions in our behalf; and I thank *you* for all your stability and perseverance and faithful coöperation in the cause of evangelical truth and order; but I must not withhold a tribute to the memories of the departed, who joined their efforts with those

of some of the fathers before me, in giving to this church a character, in the very commencement, which, by God's blessing, it has never lost.

If it should occur to any of you that I have been too prodigal of praise in what I have said, my answer is, "Honour to whom honour is due." It is right that those who have done well, should be commended for their well doing, and should be held up as examples worthy to be imitated. But more than this—in rendering due honour to man the instrument, we honour God the agent; and whatever good *man* does, is to be referred ultimately to the fountain of all good, and to God should be all the glory. I shall not, therefore, have gained my purpose, brethren, unless what I have said in commendation of the wisdom and the liberality and the love of truth and order that have so extensively prevailed in this church hitherto, shall lead you to concentrate your grateful regards upon the Giver of all good, and to resolve that, by his blessing, you will serve Him with yet greater fidelity during the residue of your lives.

I have now done what I proposed in spread-

ing before you your own history; and who will not say, in the review of the ground which we have come over, that it is fitting that we should join, as a congregation, this morning, in setting up a pillar, commemorative of that help which we have obtained from on high? If we have been blessed with peace while many other churches have been rent by discord; if we have been enabled to maintain the order of God's house, while many other churches have exhibited scenes of wild confusion; if we have held fast to the pure doctrines of Christianity when dangerous errors, even within the limits of our own communion, have been extensively propagated, let us reverently and humbly refer it to God's sovereign goodness: let us thank Him, praise Him, magnify Him, for these distinguishing testimonies of his favour. Let it not only be proclaimed by our lips, but engraven on our hearts as a perpetual memorial, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

I have spoken of having presented before you your own history as a congregation; but it is the merest outline that I have given—the entire filling up, which should include the

history of all that has been enjoyed and suffered, of all that has been done and left undone, by all the members of this congregation, during the last thirty years,—while no mortal pen or mortal tongue would be adequate to the work,—yet if it *could* be made out, as it exists at this moment in God's book of remembrance, where is the individual among you all, who would dare to look at it? There are some classes of facts indeed which it would be grateful to contemplate—such as the conversion of sinners from the error of their ways; the victories of the Christian over temptation and corruption; the service rendered in honour of Christ; the joy in tribulation; the triumph in death. But who would be willing to draw aside the vail, and look at all the fearful resistance to God's truth that has been made here, at all the trifling with the Holy Spirit that has been indulged here, at all the good resolutions that have been formed here only to be broken, at all the wrath that has been treasured up here against the day of wrath? Who could endure to scan the history of all the hearts that have bled here under the rod of God—nay, who could nerve

himself for a close and careful review of all the agony which he has himself endured from all the afflictions with which he has been visited during the last thirty years? Above all, who would dare, if he could, to trace the flight of all the immortal spirits which have departed from this congregation, having been educated here for Heaven or Hell? Are there not multitudes in respect to whom we should shudder at the thought of receiving a faithful report; and multitudes more, in respect to whose present condition, there is at best a strange intermingling of hope and fear? Oh, I repeat, it would be a wonderful history, a surprising history, a terrible history, that would be spread before us, if our eye could rest upon that page in God's eternal book, where are collected the materials from which the destiny of those who have composed this congregation is finally to be made out!

I have spoken of the past; but what shall I say of the future? Ah, the future is hid from us; and yet not entirely hid; for we know, in general, that the thing that hath been shall be: particularly we know that as death has always been doing his work here,

so he will never relax from the execution of his dread commission. It is not more certain that this house will stand, than that it will gradually become vacated of its present occupants, till not a single face that is seen here to-day shall be seen here any longer. Each successive year will furnish a fresh contribution from our numbers to the population of the eternal world. There will always be mourning families here, with hearts bleeding at the desolation that death has made in their dwellings. Another voice will soon be heard from this pulpit; and the record of my ministry—O solemn and overwhelming thought—will have reached the point beyond which nothing can be added to it. O hearers, friends, we are in a current that is setting rapidly towards eternity; the history of our probation can extend through only a few brief years at longest, before the history—the eternal history of our retribution will begin.

And is it so that we stand in these solemn circumstances? Let me then, for a moment, commune with you, as the people of my charge, in regard to your condition and prospects. What have you to say in respect to

your improvement of the privileges which you have enjoyed here in years that are past? What say *you* especially, who have listened to the preaching of the gospel in this house, during the whole time, or the greater part of the time, since it was erected? You have had the offers of salvation urged upon you here a thousand times—have you accepted them, or is your neglect of them bearing witness against you at this hour? You have passed through several revivals of religion, when there were even crowds pressing in at the strait gate—were you among those who entered, or did you resolve that you would wait for a more convenient season? You have lost beloved friends, who rendered a dying testimony to the value of religion, and, perhaps with their last breath, urged you to secure it—did you heed the dying admonition, or did you go away and plunge into the world again with as keen a relish as ever? Many of you have witnessed the close of an earnest and devoted ministry, and have received an affectionate message from the death bed of a beloved pastor that you should prepare to die—did that impressive scene melt or harden your heart—

has that ministry proved to you a savor of life unto life, or a savor of death unto death?

Answer these questions honestly, I entreat you, to your own consciences; and if you find that your great work for eternity is yet upon your hands, let not this first sabbath in the year pass, without its being earnestly and effectually begun. If you have reason to believe that you are already in the strait and narrow way, may I not hope that you will run the Christian race with more diligence and patience, that you will forget the things that are behind and press forward, so that this occasion shall mark an epoch in your Christian course, to be gratefully remembered by you throughout your whole eternal existence.

I must be allowed, in the close of this discourse, to advert, in a single word, to the uniform indulgence and good will which you have manifested towards me, during the whole period of my ministry. This is not the place to speak of my own infirmities and imperfections; and yet I cannot forbear to say that the candour which you have always exercised towards them, not less than your sympathy in my sorrows, and your considerate and gene-

rous regard to all my wants, has not only awakened towards you my warmest gratitude, but contributed much to the confidence and freedom with which I have fulfilled my ministry. You will pardon me for saying that I regard it an occasion for thankfulness that my lot has been cast in the midst of such a congregation; and sure I am that, so long as God is pleased to continue me here, which I would fain hope may be, till he shall call me to my rest, I will covet no higher honour than to spend and be spent in your service. And after that, may it please thee, thou merciful Shepherd of Israel, while these limbs shall lie withered in the grave, to have this beloved flock under thy continual guardianship, to edify and comfort them by a more devoted ministry, and to gather them successively into that glorified community above, where those who have ministered to them on earth, may meet them in a sweeter and holier fellowship, and may recognise them as their joy and crown of rejoicing!









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